**How having a good education WON'T stop your memory from declining as you get older**

* **Being educated will give you a better memory until you get older, say scientists**
* **A study of 11,000 people has found those with degrees also lose memory in age**
* **The ‘cognitive reserve theory’ says the better educated remember more**
* **However the survey from University College London has obtained new results**

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Being better educated will give you a better memory, but scientists have found it will not stop you losing it.

It has long been thought that a higher level of education, such as a university degree, can protect people from failing memory in old age.

The ‘cognitive reserve theory’ is that people with more brainpower to start with can cope and perform better when their brain starts to deteriorate.

But one of the largest studies done on education and cognitive decline has found being better educated offers no protection against decline in memory, thinking and reasoning.

A university degree is not a safeguard against memory loss

Instead people with higher levels of education, and those who are uneducated, both see their memories decline at a similar rate.

The study, by University College London, measured the cognitive ability of more than 11,000 people aged 65 and older from 10 European countries.

The participants, sorted by the number of years they had spent in education, were given memory tests at the start of the study. They were then retested every two years over an eight-year period to measure any decline in their memory.

The study found that people with higher levels of education had better baseline scores, meaning they had better memories than their counterparts with lower levels of attainment.

But those with high and low education levels saw their memory decline at the same rate over the eight years.

The study asked participants to recall a 10-word list to test their ability to immediately recall information.

They then had to recall the information again after five minutes. Germany and the Netherlands had the best performance of memory recall at study entry, while Spain had the lowest performance.

There was also a gender difference in recall with women performing better than men in most countries, but no gender difference was found in the rate at which their memories declined.

Two elederly people read a card (FILE PHOTO). The study found that those with high and low education levels saw their memory decline at the same rate over the eight years

The results were adjusted to take into account people’s age, income, health and weight.

Previous studies have shown that people with a higher level of education do have a lower rate of dementia, but research on cognitive decline has had mixed results.

This latest study suggests memory is not protected.

Dr Dorina Cadar, the study’s lead author, said: ‘Despite significant differences in educational systems across countries, education remains a strong indicator of cognitive function in later life, but this study shows we are less clear on whether education can stop the declines in cognition that come naturally with ageing.’

The study, published in the journal Neuroepidemiology, was funded by the Medical Research Council and Alzheimer’s Society.

Dr James Pickett, head of research and development at Alzheimer’s Society, said: ‘Previous studies have found that more years spent in education are linked to a lower rate of dementia.

‘Today’s findings reinforce that dementia is not a natural part of ageing and that the factors that may delay the onset of dementia might not have the same effect on the forgetfulness that is all too common as we grow older.’   
  
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